

Dan - Our report to the Monday Lobby Community,
all the best, Michael

The Trident D-5 Campaign in 1985

The 1985 vote in the House on the Trident D-5 missile was discouraging. We had hoped that we could raise the total supporting the Weiss amendment (that would delete production funds) appreciably above the 1984 level, which was 95; if we could then produce a comparable increase in 1986 we would approach a level of opposition that would draw larger national groups into the fray and induce moderate congresspeople to offer compromise measures, say a ceiling on numbers deployed. Our model was the campaign against the MX, which began in 1979 with a Dellums amendment and a dozen votes, and ended (we hope) in 1985 with a compromise. We were aware, of course, that the D-5 would not be so easy a target, as it were, as the MX.

Before the 1984 vote we had done very little lobbying, as we had decided to go after the missile only a few weeks before it. But we worked a whole year before the 1985 vote. We recruited about 150 "D-5 Coordinators" in over 100 congressional districts whose member had voted for the D-5 but solidly against the MX, and kept those coordinators well supplied with literature, alerts, and phone calls. Howard Morland personally visited about 100 congressional offices, typically spending half an hour with the defense aide to explain the mysteries of first strike. A few visits and/or phone calls were made by a dozen groups, ranging from the Freeze to Evangelicals for Social Action; most of them sent letters as well, which we distributed to all representatives along with charts, fact sheets, and reprints that we produced or gathered. It was not a massive effort--certainly small compared to the MX campaign--but it was not insignificant. Mail began to arrive in some offices for the first time on the subject. The outcome, however, is that the Weiss amendment in June of 1985 drew 80 votes.

It felt as if lobbying was counter-productive. Howard could name, in fact, a few defense aides who, when they finally understood just how devastatingly effective the D-5 would be, spoke of it much more favorably than they had when he walked in. But the reason for the defeat obviously had more to do with a combination of circumstances and mood in Congress than anything we could do one way or the other. (We actually picked up 11 new votes from among the 100 we targetted.) Rambo Fever was sweeping the country in the wake of the latest hijacking. As in 1984 the vote this year took place the day after the MX vote, but whereas last year we lost that vote and angry liberals like Addabbo switched against the D-5 the next day, this year we won the MX vote and anxious liberals like Schneider switched in favor of the D-5. "We can't vote against every missile," we were told, often with the suggestion that it was our fault that there were more than one. The constant refrain in the MX debate--that it is vulnerable to Soviet attack--hurt us the next day because most congresspeople cannot grasp the reciprocity argument (that it is equally bad, or worse, to make Soviet ICBMs vulnerable). We also failed to lobby those members who had voted with us last year, and that had something to do with our losing 19 of them this year.

So what is to be done? Some would say that a campaign against the D-5

is doomed to defeat and we should cut our losses and join an effort with some prospect of success. But we persist in the belief that the D-5 will be the worst weapon in the US arsenal, more dangerous than the MX because of its numbers and far more dangerous than SDI because unlike SDI it will work. Until someone talks us out of this conviction we would feel derelict if we did not continue to try to stop it.

It seems to be the view of all the large peace groups in Washington, with the partial exception of the Freeze, that we should only work on legislation that has a fair chance of winning within a year or so. It's an understandable temptation, but the danger is that we will be distracted, year after year, from working on less hopeful causes until they really do become hopeless. Another danger is that we will mislead both our constituents and members of Congress about what is ultimately important. First the MX and now SDI are absorbing most of our attention even though neither will bring us near the first-strike threshold. Having failed to take up the D-5 in 1984 or 1985, when it might have had some effect, the large groups must now bear some of the onus for the fact that the ninth, tenth, and eleventh Trident submarines, now under construction, will almost certainly carry the D-5, and if nothing is done in 1986 the next one or two ? submarines will also carry them.

US-SC Freeze? We have little hope of cancelling the D-5 program, but it is not impossible that we might, by 1988, say, impose a severe ceiling on the number of missiles. To do that we need the active support of several of the larger peace organizations. Though we can garner formal support and occasional labor from our member groups, the Coalition staff is simply not large enough to conduct a substantial national campaign. We would be delighted to work with any other group; one staff person for five months from three large organizations would make a difference.

Done? In 1986 the Coalition staff plans to go once more into the breach, if it is even a breach, and try to improve the vote total for another amendment to delete production funds. We will also support efforts by Markey to require the W76 warhead (now on the C-4 missile) to be emplaced on the D-5, rather than the high-yield W88. A bill to forbid retrofitting the first eight Trident submarines (now fitted for the C-4) would slow the deployment of D-5s, and we will support that. It is possible that someone like Dicks might propose a ceiling on the total numbers deployable; he hinted in this year's debate that he would someday do so.

We are also very interested in the idea of a flight-test ban, which would nip the D-5 in the bud, not to mention the Midgetman and the Soviet equivalents (the SS-24, SS-25, and SS-N-23), and perhaps SDI. The Freeze Campaign has voted to make a flight-test ban a priority, and we will join in the effort.

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